

Idaho Panhandle Avalanche Center
Avalanche Advisory

Contact: Kevin Davis (208) 265-6686, Ed Odegaard (208) 245-6209, or John Olson (208) 265-6608

This message available by calling (208) 765-7323 or toll-free at 1-866-489-8664.

E-mail address: kevingdavis@fs.fed.us, edegaard@fs.fed.us, jrolson@fs.fed.us

This is John “Oly” Olson on this clear cold morning with the Idaho Panhandle avalanche advisory, valid for today, February 19th, 2010. This report does not apply to local ski areas within the forecast region and will remain in effect through midnight, February 19th. Thanks to Mick and the crew at Idaho Dept. of Lands, Priest Lake Area for their support. This advisory is sponsored by Idaho Parks and Recreation.

WEATHER

Remember last week when we were all amped for a big weekend of powder skiing? Well, it sure turned out to be a great example of spatial variability with variable amounts even in what you would call the “local area”. This reporting period and longer term forecast should prove to be more reliable with cold nights, warm days with a northerly flow of continental air. No precip is forecast until possibly Wednesday into Thursday next. Read all about it at <http://www.wrh.noaa.gov/otx/>.

Avalanche conditions for the Selkirk are rated as CONSIDERABLE for northerly wind loaded slopes greater than 35 degrees above 5500’. Natural avalanches are possible and human caused avalanches are probable. Southerly aspects are rated as MODERATE above 5000’ until a warming event occurs. Natural avalanches are unlikely and human triggered avalanches are possible. **Avalanche conditions are rated as LOW on slopes less than 35 degrees.** Natural and human triggered avalanches are unlikely.

Snowpack

Yesterday Mike and I ventured into the Selkirk Range to the Mt. Roothaan area up the Indian Cr. drainage to Horton ridge. We didn’t take the regular route up Hunt Cr. because of lack of snow at the trailhead. The Indian Cr. Route still had adequate snow cover and had four other snow machine rigs there when we exited. Once you get to 5000’ it really turned into a winter wonder land. At 6400’ we found a very reactive 9” on the southern exposures and 12” on the north exposures. These shears in near surface faceting came out very easy with Q1 shears and literally jumped off the melt freeze bed surface. In fact, I ended up head down in the snow pit after getting a “Reusch Block 2”, talk about studying the snow closely! There was buried surface hoar at 18” and 24” or so on earlier ice crusts on the northerlies. These layers could become entrained into stair steps with a large enough slide. Folks, the main dangers come when the pack rapidly warms or is rapidly loaded by rain or machines. I would beware of any southerly slope over 35 deg. on sunny days. I would not venture onto wind loaded northerly slopes 35 deg. or greater above 5500’.

Terrain

Spatial variability is the wild card on the IPNF right now. Note the differences in reports below. Areas of wind loading will be more sensitive and there could be places where the avalanche hazard is pushing CONSIDERABLE.

Cabinet Mountains are rated as MODERATE on wind-loaded aspects greater than 35 degrees above 5000 feet.

Snowpack

Yesterday Kevin and Eric ventured up Lightening Cr. above Clark Fork, ID to the Char creek area. Their travels found a reactive layer down about 6-8" at 6000 feet but below that layer the snow was consolidated and quite stable. Kevin did relay that rapid warming through solar gain could push the hazard rating to considerable.

Terrain

Spatial variability is the watch word in the Cabinets this weekend. When the snow starts falling out of the trees forming point releases and pin wheels it's time to get to the low angle areas. Beware of being below sun heated outcroppings. Areas of wind loading will be more sensitive and there could be places where the avalanche hazard is pushing CONSIDERABLE.

Avalanche conditions for the St. Regis Basin are rated as MODERATE on wind-loaded aspects greater than 35 degrees above 4,500 feet. Natural avalanches are unlikely and human triggered avalanches are possible. **Avalanche conditions are rated as LOW on slopes less than 35 degrees.** Natural and human triggered avalanches are unlikely.

Snowpack

Carole ventured out at Lookout Pass yesterday and found some of those warm sunny slopes. Overall the snow was very stable but the sun was penetrating into the surface 8" or so and the north slopes got mushy by late in the day at 4900'. Her main shear was the faceted snow at the ground with a much consolidated pack above that. She also noted that she found only 73 cm or about 28" of total snow pack. Winter is going away quickly in some areas.

Terrain

Stay off steep slopes if you notice the temperature starting to rise and snow falling out of the trees. Carole noted point releases in the steeper terrain and said that these areas at peak heat of the day the hazard is considerable.

NO REPORT FROM THE ST. JOE

The next advisory will be issued on Friday, February 26th, 2010.

If you have a group or club that is interested in more education on avalanche safety feel free to give us a call. As usual we would appreciate hearing from anyone who happens to observe any recent avalanche activity while out in the backcountry or just wants to let us know what is going on in their area. You can reach Kevin Davis in Sandpoint by calling (208) 265-6686. There will be avalanche awareness classes at St. Maries 2/26,27/10,

Priest lake 3/5,6/10 and Wallace 3/12,13/10. Contact Marc Hildesheim at Idaho Parks and Recreation at 208-769-1511 or go to their web site <http://parksandrecreation.idaho.gov/> and follow the links.

Avalanche conditions change for better or worse continually. Backcountry travelers should be prepared to assess current conditions for themselves, plan their routes of travel accordingly, and never travel alone. Backcountry travelers can reduce their exposure to avalanche hazards by utilizing timbered trails and ridge routes and by avoiding open and exposed terrain with slope angles of 30 degrees or more. Backcountry travelers should carry the necessary avalanche rescue equipment such as a shovel, avalanche probe or probe ski poles, a rescue beacon and a well-equipped first aid kit.

Have a safe and pleasant weekend. But don't forget to have fun and be careful.